

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00

INRE-00 SSM-03 IO-11 DHA-02 ORM-02 OMB-01 AID-05

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 MC-02 SAM-01 SAB-01 SCCT-01 OC-05 CCO-00

A-01 OPR-02 SY-05 SCA-01 SCS-03 USSS-00 AF-06 /115 W

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O P 101130Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8939

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY ATHENS IMMEDIATE

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY SANA

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 2160

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, LE
SUBJECT: LEBANESE ARMY MUTINIES MULTIPLY: CABINET IMPASSE
CONTINUES: PARLIAMENT'S TERM EXTENDED

SUMMARY: TAKEOVERS OF ARMY POSTS IN SOUTH BY MUTINEERS
MARCH 8-10 ARE STIRRING POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE CONSIDERABLY.
LEFTISTS UNDER JUMBLATT AND RIGHTISTS LED BY CHAMOUN ARE
WIDELY SPLIT ON THE ISSUE. ADVERSE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL (I.E.,
ISRAELI) REPERCUSSIONS ARE FEARED. KHADDAM IS HERE IN ATTEMPT
RESOLVE THE PROBLEM. COMBINATION OF TOUGHNESS AND CONCILIA-
TION TOWARD REBELS MAY BE TRIED, BUT OPTIONS ARE LIMITED.
MEANWHILE, CABINET IMPASSE CONTINUES ALTHOUGH RUMORS OF AN
IMMINENT EIGHTEEN-MAN GOVERNMENT ARE CIRCULATING). ONLY VAILD
POLITICAL ACCOMPLISHMENT OF PAST FEW DAYS WAS PASSAGE MARCH
9 OF BILL TO PROLONG PARLIAMENT'S TERM UNTIL JULY 1978. END
SUMMARY.

1. TAKEOVER BY REBELLIOUS SOLDIERS OF ARMY POSTS IN SOUTH
LEBANON MARCH 8-10 HAS REKINDLED POLITICAL TEMPERATURE IN
CAPITAL. JUST AS AKKAR INCIDENT IN NORTH SEEMED ON WAY TO
BEING CALMED, THESE LATEST MANIFESTATIONS OF ARMY DISINTEGRA-
TION REVEAL CLEARLY HOW FAR LEBANON IS FROM END OF ITS LONG
CRISIS. BEIRUTIS NEVERTHELESS CONTINUE EFFORT AT NORMALIZATION,
AS STREETS ARE PACKED IN DAYTIME WITH CARS AND PEDESTRIANS.
SECURITY MEASURES BEGUN LAST WEEK ARE HAVING GOOD EFFECT IN
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MOST OF BEIRUT'S STREETS. ALTHOUGH AN UPSURGE IN KIDNAPPINGS
AND COUNTER-KIDNAPPINGS OCCURRED MARCH 9, SO FAR EVENTS IN
SOUTH HAVE NOT SWUNG CAPITAL INTO SIEGE ATMOSPHERE AND ARE
LIKELY TO DO SO ONLY IF DESERTIONS CONTINUE UNABATED AND FEARS
OF REVIVED ARMED STRUGGLE ARE PERMITTED TO RISE AGAIN. SYRIAN
FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM AND GENERAL JAMIL FROM DAMASCUS
ARE HERE IN EFFORT TO PUT TOGETHER A SETTLEMENT OF THIS AND
OTHER PROBLEMS, INCLUDING THE CABINET-FORMING IMPASSE.

I. ARMY MUTINIES

2. TAKEOVER MARCH 8 OF ARNOUN POST NEAR NABATIYEH WAS UNILATERAL ACT OF MOSLEM SERGEANT NAMED HAMAD JAABER, WHO LED FIFTY MEN IN MUTINY AGAINST OFFICERS. JAABER CLAIMED ARMY DISPLAYED PRO-CHRISTIAN BIAS AND PLEDGED HIS ALLEGIANCE TO LT. KHATIB'S FORCE OF DESERTERS IN BEKAA VALLEY. THE MARCH 9 INCIDENTS AT RASHAYA AND KFAR MECHKI ON SLOPES OF MOUNT HERMON (FARTHER FROM ISRAELI BORDER THAN ARNOUN) APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN SIMILAR INDIVIDUAL ACTS OF MUTINY WHOSE EFFECT IS TO AUGMENT KHATIB'S ARMY. RASHAYA UPRISING WAS LED BY MOSLEM OFFICERS.

3. THERE IS LATE NEWS THAT KHAYYAM POST NEAR MARJAYOUN, CLOSE TO ISRAEL, WENT OVER TO KHATIB'S MEN EARLY MARCH 10, AND THAT A PRO-KHATIB FORCE ATTACKED BARRACKS IN NABATIYEH BUT RETREATED WHEN SAIQA UNITS ARRIVED ON SCENE. OTHER POSTS MAY FALL SOON. THE DISSIDENT FORCE OF MAJ. MAMARY IN THE NORTH MAY BE GETTING INTO THE BARRACKS TAKEOVER ACT AS THE ROT SPREADS. WE HAVE JUST LEARNED THE ARTILLERY BARRACKS AT ARAM AN GROTH OF TRIPOLI ALREADY HAS GONE OVER TO MAMARY.

4. LEFTISTS ELEMENTS LED BY KAMAL JUMBLATT, BEN ON FURTHERING THEIR POLITICAL DEMANDS WHICH ONLY MINIMALLY ACCEPTED SO FAR IN THE GIVE-AND-TAKE OF SYRIAN MEDIATION, ARE OPENLY BACKING KHATIB AND HIS GROWING BAND. JUMBLATT CALLED THE ARNOUN EVENT "THE START OF WINDS OF CHANGE AND REVOLUTION" HE MAY SEEK TO FORCE SYRIANS MORE TOWARD HIS SIDE IN POLITICAL PROCESS. PALESTINIANS INCLUDING FATAH, WHO PROBABLY COULD CRUSH KHATIB IF THEY WISHED, HAVE SO FAR POINTEDLY FAILED TO DO SO--ALSO PROBABLY TO SIGNAL SYRIANS ALONG SAME LINES.

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5. MEANWHILE INTERIOR MINISTER CHAMOUN WITH SUPPORT OF AIR FORCE COMMANDER COLONEL GHARIB, INSISTED IN EMERGENCY CABINET MEETING MARCH 8 THAT FIRM ACTION BE TAKEN AGAINST ARNOUN REBELS, INCLUDING USE OF AIR FORCE. THOUGH VINTAGE CHAMOUN, THIS TOUGH STANCE PROBABLY REFLECTS CHRISTIAN RIGHTIST FEARS WITH REASONABLE ACCURACY. FACT THAT CHAMOUN WALKED OUT OF MEETING EARLY IN UNHAPPY MOOD SHOWS HE DIDN'T GET FAR, AS KARAME TOOK HIS FAMILIAR POSITION THAT MEDIATION IS PROPER ROAD TO SOLUTION. FRANGIE CONTENTED HIMSELF WITH STRESSING THE GRAVITY OF SUCH PROVOCATIVE ACTS CLOSE TO ISRAELI BORDER, CLAIMING THE GAVE ISRAEL "PRETEXT TO TAKE HOLD OF SOUTH LEBANON AND DRAG THE ARAB COUNTRIES INTO A NEW WAR WHOSE TIMING AND LOCALE THEY HAVE NOT CHOSEN." THIS STATEMENT IS NOT JUST RHETORIC, FOR THE FEAR OF AN ISRAELI REACTION OF SOME SORT UNDERLIES THINKING IN ALL CIRCLES HERE. IT CONSTITUTES ULTIMATE TRAGEDY THAT STILL

COULD EMERGE FROM FESTERING LEBANESE CRISIS.

6. AS WE SEE IT, CURRENT SYRIAN EFFORT TO END MUTINIES FACES
THREE OPTIONS:

(A) SHOW OF FORCE BY PLA AND SAIQA TO BRING KHATIB AND OTHER
DESERTERS TO HEEL. THE PHYSICAL CAPABILITY EXISTS TO DO THIS,
BUT SYRIANS SO FAR HAVE BEEN SKITTISH ABOUT HEAVY-HANDED TACTICS
IN LEBANON FOR VARIETY OF REASONS. THERE IS ALSO PALESTINIAN
REACTION TO CONSIDER, ESPECIALLY IN FATAH. FEDAYEEN
UNHAPPINESS AT SEEING A PLESTINIAN FORCE USED AGAINST A
LEFTIST LEADER IS DETERRANT TO SYRIANS.

(B) NEGOTIATION WITH KHATIB. THE SYRIANS TRIED THIS IN EARLIER
EFFORTS WITH KHATIB, WITHOUT SUCCESS.

(C) TAKING KHATIB'S SIDE AND BECOMING MORE PRO-LEFTISTIST IN
LEBANESE POLITICAL STRUGGLE, HOPING THIS WILL APPEASE THE DESERT-
ERS. THE PREDICTABLE REACTION ON THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT, OF COURSE,
IS THE MAIN OBSTACLE TO SUCH A COURSE.

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O P 101130Z MAR 76

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 2160

7. LATEST INDIATIONS ARE THAT THE SYRIANS MAY TRY A COMBINATION OF THE ABOVE. RUMORS ARE THAT THE PLA AND/OR SAIQA WILL INDEED MOVE INTO THE LOCALES TOUCHED BY THE MUTINIES. MEANWHILE, SAI'SQA'S ZUHAIR MUHSIN REPORTEDLY CONFERRED WITH KHATIB PERSONALLY IN THE BEKAA MARCH 8, WHILE MUHSIN WAS ON THE WAY TO DAMASCUS. THE LEBANESE CABINET, IT ITS REGULAR SESSION TODAY, MAY EXTEND PERIOD OF AMNESTY TO DESERTERS FOR ANOTHER DAY OR TWO. GIVEN KHATIB'S OBSTINACY UP TO NOW, WE ENVISAGE SOME CONCESSIONS TO HIM BY THE SYRIANS IF ATTEMPTS TO GET HIM BACK INTO THE FOLD ARE TO BEAR FRUIT.

8. WHILE THIS WOULD BE A SATISFACTORY OUTCOME TO KARAME, UNHAPPINESS ON THE RIGHT AND WITHIN THE ARMY OFFICER CORPS IS PREDICTABLE. IN SUM, A DILEMMA EXISTS WHICH, WILE NOT YET INSOLUBLE, MAY BE OUTDISTANCING EFFORTS TO CONTROL IT. THE ONLY VIABLE SOLUTION MAY BE A DE FACTO SPLIT OF THE ARMY INTO

WHOLLY MOSLEM AND WHOLLY CHRISTIAN UNITS UNDER A PRO FORMA
COMMAND STRUCTURE. WHETHER EVEN THIS IS VIABLE IS OPEN TO
QUESTION.

II. FORMATION OF NEW CABINET

9. THOUGH NOT STRICTLY RELATED, THE ARMY MUTINIES AND UNRE-
SOLVED CABINET PROBLEM FEED ON EACH OTHER. POLITICAL IMPASSE
SHOWN BY CABINET IMBROGLIO MAY HAVE ENCOURAGED MUTINEERS;
RASH OF DESERTIONS HARDENS POSITIONS OF CHAMOUN AND JUMBLATT
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IN CABINET IMPASSE.

10. ON MARCH 9 POLITICAL CIRCLES THOUGHT SYRIANS, INCONCERT
WITH FRANGIE, MIGHT SIMPLY ANNOUNCE SIXTEEN-MAN CABINET
CONSISTING OF NAMES CURRENTLY DISCUSSED AS MOST LIKELY CANDI-
DATES ON BOTH SIDES. STRATEGY WOULD BE THAT QUARRELING POLITICOS
WOULD HAVE TO ACCEPT FAIT ACCOMPLI. HOWEVER, JUMBLATT IN
PARTICULAR PUBLICLY DENOUNCED THIS TACTIC AS SOON AS HE GOT
WIND OF IT.

11. MATTER IS STILL UP IN THE AIR, AND THERE IS LITTLE SIGN OF GIVE
FROM EITHER CHAMOUN OR JUMBLATT. CHAMOUN NOW TAKES VIEW
THAT SOLUTION OF ARMY'S PROBLEM MUST PRECEDE CABINET
FORMATION, A VARIATION OF THE OLD SECURITY-FIRST LINE OF THE
CHRISTIANS. WE UNDERSTAND THAT KHADDAM IS PUSHING OPPOSITE
SET OF PRIORITIES, SEEKING CABINET FIRST AND SETTLEMENT OF DESER-
TIONS LATER. HE MAY BE USING ARMY'S DIFFICULTIES AS CLUB ON
LEBANESE POLITICOS TO SHAPE UP AND FORM A GOVERNMENT. SOME
OPTIMISM IS BEING EXPRESSED TODAY, MARCH 10, THAT CABINET
WILL EMERGE SOON. AN EIGHTEEN-MAN LIST IS CIRCULATING.

III. PROLONGATION OF PARLIAMENT.

12. EVERY NOW AND THEN A POLITICAL IDEA ACTUALLY MEETS SUCCESS IN
LEBANON'S PRESENT PREDICAMENT. PARLIAMENT MARCH 9 VOTED TO
EXTEND ITS TERMS FOR 26 MONTHS, I.E., UNTIL JULY 1978, THUS AVOID-
ING NATIONWIDE ELECTIONS IN THE COUNTRY'S TENSE ATMOSPHERE
THIS YEAR. THE PARLIAMENT ALSO EXTENDED THE MANDATES OF
MUNICIPAL AND VILLAGE COUNCILS UNTIL JUNE 1977.

13. NOTE FOR NEA/ARN: THIS MESSAGE REPLACES TODAY'S
0900 REPORT.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
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Concepts: CABINET, GOVERNMENT OVERTHROW, MILITARY PERSONNEL, POLITICAL STABILITY, CIVIL DISORDERS, PLOTS
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Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 10 MAR 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
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Disposition Action: RELEASED
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Disposition Authority: BoyleJA
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